

A CITY IS A CIVILIZATION

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A city is a civilization.

Such a civilization need not be ideal. A city cannot be perfect. Probably it will be a mature city. Necessarily it must be a complete city.

It is not sufficient for a city to provide services for its people. Mere largeness does not count. Business and industry with consequent economic prosperity are not enough. Even good government cannot build a civilization alone. It needs the works of many hands. But the complete city is concerned with the realms of the mind and spirit. People, by nature, tend to gather into urban communities. But these communities do not naturally become cities.

A true city is a civilization in itself.

Ancient Athens stands for something beyond itself. It signifies the very concept of excellence. Its history proclaims a unique achievement in civic affairs. From the time of the Romans until today men have been united in their admiration of this ancient city.

Why has so much of the world for so long a time looked upon Athens as the perfect city? Is it not because of the image that Athens evokes in the mind? Many of the ideas and the institutions which are regnant in our lives today had their genesis in the theatre of Athenian life and thought. Amenities must have been meager indeed for many Athenians. But it is the visual image of the Acropolis crowned by

the Parthenon presiding in such majesty and serenity over the city that makes its marks on the minds of men.

Dominant yet not dominating, Athena, the civic deity signified in the Parthenon, suffused the life of Athens with a quality of things spiritual. The plays of Aeschylus reveal how Athena provided a civic conscience. All of life was lived under the aspect of civic theology. Religion was built into the culture. It transformed the culture into a civilization.

Athens is perfect as the Parthenon is perfection and all life is related to it and draws from it. Religion is in the culture. Religion is not outside the culture. Religion is not set against the culture.

Is Athens the portrait of a city as it should be? Clearly it is a city ruled by the mind and spirit. It is a civilization. Athens is a city ordered by the highest reaches of its civilization—its civic theology.

But Fustel de Coulanges in the classic study of *The Ancient City* demonstrates how Christianity destroyed this city. And, as Christianity broke up the idols and wrecked the shrines of the civic deities of the ancient cities, it shattered the civic institutions which had been built upon this theology.

Christianity destroyed Athens. Paul of Tarsus in his address to the Athenians on Mars Hill dramatizes the manner in which Christianity destroyed civic deities. Indeed the journeys of Paul among the an-

cient cities of the Mediterranean were directed toward this end.

Yet civic theology was restored for a time in the cities which emerged in western Europe after the advent of Christianity. The cityscape was again dominated by the manifestation of man's spiritual quest. The Cathedrals of Orvieto and of Chartres and of Canterbury, like the Parthenon, signify the rule of theology in civic affairs. The social structure of the medieval city was simple. It was divided into either Dominican or Franciscan. The Church was the community. The community was a church. Religion saturated life. All behavior became acts of piety. All vocations were in service of religion. Religion was in the culture. The culture was transmuted into a civilization.

This is as it should be. Athens and the Parthenon. Chartres and its Cathedral. Here are represented the highest aspects of man's civic life. Here are symbolized his spiritual aspirations. Here are the places which provide for his spiritual growth. It is proper that the Temple and the Cathedral should be the prevailing forms against the skylines of man's towns and cities. Old Trinity Church at the entrance to Wall Street and Saint Patrick's Cathedral set against Rockefeller Plaza are parables of the ways of men in cities. It is desirable that these sacramentals of his religion should be the background against which he lives and plays and works and thinks and prays day by day.

We admire the perfection of Athens. We wonder at the unity of the medieval city. We have a nostalgia for the serenity of the New England village. Perhaps it is because the visual and the conceptual images of these cities and towns are, in our minds, ordered by these signs of the spirit. There is no such order in the modern city. All coherence is gone. Relentless forces have brought about a change.

Change is an inevitable law of this world.

The shift from a liturgical time to a secular calendar thrust men into a new psychological pattern.

Allegiances shifted to the larger political entities of principalities, states, and nations with a sacrifice of civic loyalty.

Values underwent transformation in the midst of an industrial revolution which emphasized science and technology.

THE INFLUENCE of religion in society changed as the place of the Church receded in everyday affairs.

The factory and the skyscraper began to crowd and to tower over the Cathedral and the Temple.

The changes in psychology, in loyalties, in values, and in religion reflected themselves in the cityscape.

The civic life of old New Orleans found its focus in Jackson Square dominated by the Cathedral. Contemporary New Orleans revolves around the civic center whose point of convergence is the magnificent new city hall.

The spiritual is no longer sovereign in the cityscape. Neither is the spiritual paramount in the life of the people. A civic culture is emerging in America. It is not a civilization. The task of religion is to transform this culture into a civilization.

The logic of America is relentless. The logic of the pre-industrial 18th century was the rural agrarian society of Thomas Jefferson. The logic of Victorian England's industrialization, railroads, and steamships, was Birmingham and Manchester. The logic of 19th century United States was Pittsburgh and Chicago. The logic of 20th century United States is not only the Detroit that produces the automobile but the Los Angeles and the Dallas that are, in turn, the products of it. The logic of America is the city.

Urbanization is changing our character. Urbanization is modifying our culture. Urbanization is transforming our institutions. Among these institutions are the Church and the Synagogue. *Religion today is challenged to create an urban civilization.* It is a task for religion. The task should not be abdicated. Religion has abandoned the city and left its redemption to business and industry. Only religion can redeem. Only religion can regenerate our cities by making them a place for spiritual growth. Business and industry are finding a way to replace the market. But how is the altar restored to a whole urban region—to the new city? Surely the same forces that had a part in the formation of the city must play their part in its transformation but the tasks are different and make insistent demands upon corporation and church alike.

Urban life today represents a break with the past. It is distinct. It has a new orientation. Urban life today takes place in the large city. We need to think in larger concepts. We cannot restore an ancient tradition. We cannot use a civic tradition out of the 19th century. We cannot use the urban ways of even the first half of the 20th century. The shift from rural to urban America today engages new forces with new functions.

American civilization during this last half of the 20th century shows a distinct break with the civilization of the first half of the century.

We are moving into a new phase of civic culture. A vast civic system of tentacular bodies is sprawling over this continent with the urban concentrations pushing toward the edges of it—along the Atlantic seaboard—around the Great Lakes—following the Gulf of Mexico—having a rebirth in the Mississippi Valley—appearing in the Southwest and dramatically transforming California.

Nothing would be more unfortunate than to see in the total urbanization of the United States today a simple continuation of the process of preceding years. New forces are giving shape to the cities that are performing new functions. New concepts will have to be created to work with them.

The logic of America is one vast city. How do we

avoid this ruthless logic of urbanization? One way is to transform our large urban communities into a system of civic civilizations. Each urban region could possess its own civilization. How do we make a civilization out of an urban region? How do we transform it from an *urbs* to a *civitas*? The logic of America is the city but we do not have good cities. The reason urban life is so unsatisfactory is because cities are incomplete. Urban centers are undefined. They have no limits. They leave life incomplete, frustrated and fragmented.

The ancient city was complete. It had a visual wholeness. It had a total set of institutions. It was a simple city but it provided a total experience of life.

WHAT is a city? What makes for the difference between an *urbs* and a *civitas*? What distinguishes between an urban agglomeration and a true city? What is the nature of the city?

The city possesses a complete cultural system. It is a total cultural entity. But cities can have a culture without being a civilization. New York is a civilization. San Francisco is a civilization. Hartford is a civilization. Charleston, South Carolina, is a civilization. There are few true cities in the United States. Cities that are complete civilizations.

But what is the measure? What makes for the total cultural system that creates a city? Pausanias, a Greek traveler of the second century, A.D., and a commentator on the cities of his time, described the polis as having as its essential units a temple to the civic deity, a gymnasium where the young men gathered to talk philosophy, a theatre where the people learned of the civic tradition, an agora where civic debates took place and destinies were determined, and an aqueduct with fountains which provided the city with its supply of water. Any community which had these five elements was, according to Pausanias, a city. These parts were adequate to provide a complete experience in civic life.

What are some of the criteria by which we measure city-ness? What are the elements that give character to the city? Since, by its nature, a city "educates" we expect it to have a total program of education to provide for the continuing intellectual growth of its citizens. A city will have inspired creative activities in the arts which embody the unique aspects of its own personality. Perhaps we can expect an individualized style of architecture to give character to a city. Some cities have their own language. The complete city reflects a diversified financial, commercial and industrial spectrum. A city thinks enough of its history to build a town hall worthy of it. A city is expected to have a symbol which reflects its heritage such as Mount Vernon Place in Baltimore or Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia. The complete city will furnish itself for gracious domestic

living, for to live in the city means interior living. A city sustains a variety of vocations that enables every man to fulfill his aspirations. Again, the city must have "a place" for the cultivation of the mind and the spirit.

City living has become a ritual. There are many roles for men and women in its theatre of life. It is a highly differentiated society. This urban and industrial society tends to treat men as interchangeable parts.

Man is a part. He is an electrician, an engineer, an executive. Whether he lives in Albuquerque, Los Angeles, or Pittsburgh, he plays the same role in the same manner. Modern mobility makes this an easy thing. But there is danger in such interchangeability. The interchangeable man becomes the standardized man. The civic system tends to standardize. Cities appear to be interchangeable, too.

So the city needs a complete rationale of culture, for the complete city will be a unique city and create a unique personality—integrated and civilized—the complete man. This is the new urbanity. The urbane man. Not suburban. Not exurbane.

The city is not a jungle stalked by terror although cities have jungles. The city is not a laboratory for social research although much can be learned from it. The city is not a prison filled with hatred although it can be indifferent. The city is not a place of dehumanization although parts of it are inhumane. Cities are not uncivilized although there are barbarians who live in cities. Some of the barbarians did not come from cities. Some are emigrants from town and country.

There is evil in the city but the city is not inherently bad. Men make the city. It will be just as imperfect as men are imperfect. To be a complete city does not mean to be a perfect city. It does not need to be an ideal city. But the complete city will approximate the ideal city and its citizens will be complete to the extent that the city is complete.

It is not that the city has an intrinsic value. Neither does the downtown. Nor the suburbs. It is the civic function that is important. It is the function that the city performs that makes it a civilization.

WHAT is the function of the city? It is through the city that the individual realizes his citizenship. The city provides the civilization that enables man to be a complete human being. By means of the city a man can realize himself in community with other men. There is a division of responsibilities. The city has a responsibility to be a city. The people of a place have the responsibility to make it a civilization. The city is not only a creator—it is a creation.

If it is complete and whole, it is generating or creating a civilization. A great city is capable of a renaissance. It has the capacity to renew itself from generation to generation. Cities pass through cycles. There is a law of obsolescence. Slums, disease, de-

linquency and ugliness have to go. They are symptoms of civic immorality. You redeem a city from these sins because of a sense of humanity.

Ever so often it becomes socially necessary, functionally desirable, politically possible and economically feasible to renew parts of cities.

We seek the regeneration of cities for no other reason than to civilize. Our purpose is to restore its humanity. You make a city humane by saturating it with the humanities. There is no other way. It is according to the nature of the city "to civilize".

Now to make a complete city there must be a place to inspire spiritual growth. There are two ways of seeing a city. Two ways of living in it. Two scales for it. One is the town-scale. Here many parish churches serve their neighborhood communities. The other is the city-scale. The whole city needs one place for spiritual growth that is commensurate with the size of the city.

It should be a place where the religious life which is now lying around in pieces, is unified and brought together—a religious center. There are civic centers, medical centers, educational centers, and shopping centers. Why not a center for religion? Such a center is a sanctuary for a whole city. Yet it stands in judgment over the city. It is prophetic as well as sacramental.

Social welfare, recreation, episodic revivals are not enough. The city needs "a meeting place" which provides for the sustained cultivation of the spirit. An architecture of religion would incarnate the visible arts and be both a refuge from and a rebuttal to the marketplace. Performances in the action arts would, through radio and television, reach into a whole urban region. Such a center could help to restore a sense of community to the large city. Such a center would be the focus of the thrust for civic individuality. For it is in the realms of the spirit that our greatest differences appear. It is in the reaches of the spirit that our truest freedom lies. Such a center should reflect the "genius" of the city.

Look at Manhattan. There is the Rockefeller Plaza for business and industry, the Lincoln Square Center for the Performing Arts, the United Nations Plaza for the ecumenical movement in world affairs, and the Columbia University-city for academic activities. A center for religion would help to give proportion to the city. Like the Parthenon it would be the spiritual symbol of the city. As the Cathedral, it would embody the aspirations of the people. An architecture of theology would once more mark the cityscape. Architectural visibility gives definition to the purposes of these "places".

The American city is a place of cultural and, particularly, religious pluralism. Perhaps the *Three Chapels* of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish traditions on the campus of Brandeis University are an archetype of what might be raised up on a

grand scale to dramatize the place of religion in the life of our cities. Differentiation would be preserved. Traditions would be continued. But the consequent center would be large enough to have meaning against the scale of the city. The city is not and never will be again a center of religion but religion can be given a central place in the city. Through such a center the Hebraic tradition and the Christian tradition can be restored to their places in the life and thought of the people and made the essence of the city.

Such a religious center might be the repository of the spirit of a city and its people. It would serve the function of creating a humane community. It will stand in protest against the ugly, the degrading, and the mean. And the spiritual growth which it nurtures will work a transformation in the city's ways. Religion once served a civic function. Perhaps religion again can set up the higher rules for citizenship in a city—as it restores the civic virtues to their proper place.

It appears that inspired ideas and inexhaustible human energy converge at times to produce magnificent civic achievements. Athens in the fifth century, London in the time of Elizabeth I, Amsterdam in the 17th century, and Chicago in the late 19th century were such confluences of creative minds. The city then becomes the physical, the social and the cultural framework for the constructive activities of the artists, the philosophers, the engineers and the civic statesmen. We live in an age of large cities. Can we make our cities great? Can we create a civilization of Columbus? A civilization of Little Rock? A civilization of Omaha?

What were the forces that enabled the peasants of Europe after several generations of liberation from the soil of serfdom to build the Town Halls of Florence and Siena, the Cathedral at Chartres and the town houses of the burghers in Ghent and Bruges? The forces were the new ideas in civil government, in theology and concerning family life. All had their origins in religion. Is it accidental that the beginnings of Western urban civilization coincided with a creative age of the Church? Religion had a premier place in the formation of the city. Can religion transform it? Transmute it?

The city is its people.

The physical city is the outward form of its civilization.

The city is the material manifestation of an invisible reality—the soul of its people. It is a sacramental.

"Not houses finely roofed

Or the stones of walls well builded

Nay, nor canals and dockyards make

The City, but men able to use their

Opportunity."

(Alcaeus)